Academic goal orientations, multiple goal profiles, and friendship intimacy among early adolescents

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Abstract

This study investigated the relations between early adolescents' academic motivational orientations and an aspect of quality of friendship: intimacy. Two-hundred and three Jewish-Israeli seventh grade students responded to surveys asking them about their academic achievement goals and about characteristics of their friendships. Variable-centered regression analyses suggested that mastery goals were positively associated with mutual sharing of difficulties, trust, and adaptive social problem-solving between friends, whereas performance-approach goals were negatively associated with intimacy friendship. Moreover, both performance-approach and performance-avoidance goals were associated with mistrust, inconsideration, and tension between friends. A person-centered analysis, employing cluster analysis, suggested that profiles with a higher level of mastery goals relative to both types of performance goals were associated with less mistrust among friends in comparison with profiles with a higher level of performance goals relative to mastery goals. The findings point to the connection between academic motivation and social relationships in school.
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1. Introduction

In the past two decades, achievement goal theory has become one of the most prominent frameworks for the conceptualization and investigation of students' experiences in school (Elliot, 1999; Pintrich, 1994). Most research in this framework, however, has

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focused on academic engagement such as cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies, grades, and school-related behavior and affect (see reviews in Ames, 1992; Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Brophy, 2004; Elliot, 1999; Kaplan, Middleton, Urdan, & Midgley, 2002; Pintrich, 2000a; Urdan, 1997a). Only in the past few years have achievement goal theorists begun to explore more broadly the relations between students' academic motivational orientations and other aspects of their school experiences such as social relationships (e.g., Anderman, 1999; Kaplan, 2004; Patrick, Anderman, & Ryan, 2002) and overall well-being (e.g., Kaplan & Maehr, 1999; Dykman, 1998). The findings from these investigations provide strong support to the notion that the academic and social domains are not distinct in students' school experiences (cf. Birch & Ladd, 1996; Blumenfeld, 1992; Urdan & Maehr, 1995; Vandel & Hembree, 1994). Moreover, this research suggests that different academic motivational orientations may be accompanied by characteristic qualities or styles of social interaction (e.g., Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Ryan, Hicks, & Midgley, 1997; Levy, Kaplan, & Patrick, 2004).

The present study adds to this emerging literature by using both variable- and person-centered approaches to investigate the relations between academic goals orientations, students' multiple goal profiles, and one important aspect of students' social relationships with peers in school: Quality of friendship.

2. Achievement goal theory

Achievement goal theory concerns the purposes or goal orientations that students construe for action. These purposes represent comprehensive meaning systems of situations or contexts that have cognitive, emotional and behavioral consequences (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kaplan & Maehr, 2002). Current research emphasizes the prevalence of three types of goal orientations among students: mastery goals, performance-approach goals, and performance-avoidance goals (Elliot & Church, 1997; Middleton & Midgley, 1997; Skaalvik, 1997).[1] Mastery goals refer to an orientation towards developing competence, and are often associated with a focus on understanding, developing skills, and mastering the task. Mastery-oriented students employ task-mastery and intrapersonal criteria of improvement for evaluating progress and success and are not concerned with others' perceptions of their ability. In contrast, performance-approach goals refer to an orientation towards demonstrating high ability. Performance-approach oriented students are concerned with the ability impressions that they make on others, and employ comparative standards to evaluate their success in demonstrating superior ability. Performance-avoidance goals refer to an orientation towards avoiding demonstrating low ability. Performance-avoidance oriented students are also concerned with the ability impressions that they make on others; however, these students are oriented towards the possibility of failure—demonstrating low ability—and attempt to avoid it. These students also use

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[1] More recently, some achievement goal theorists suggested that a fourth achievement goal orientation, mastery-avoidance, conceptualized as an orientation to avoid deterioration of skills or missing opportunities for learning, should be added to the list of the three goal orientations mentioned (Elliot, 1999; Pintrich, 2000b). This goal orientation was suggested on a conceptual (i.e., theoretical symmetry) rather than an empirical basis, and there is a wide perceptions that currently "there is much research to be done before mastery-avoid goals can be accepted as valid or useful in goal theory" (Pintrich, 2003, p. 676). Therefore, the present study does not address this motivational orientation.